WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A multimedia player capable of playing back digital contents, comprising:

a control which acquire an instruction related to playback of a content via a user's instruction;

a reader which reads the content from an external storage medium installed in the multimedia player to serve as an area for storing data for the content;

a storage which stores data for a plurality of function icons representing respective types of playback functions for playing back respective types of contents, and data for a plurality of medium icons representing respective types of external storage mediums that can be installed in the multimedia player;

a display processor which displays an on-screen menu related to playback of the content and processes playback of the content thus read; and

a menu controller which generates image data for the on-screen menu in which the plurality of function icons and at least one of the plurality of medium icons are arranged in a two-dimension array, wherein

the reader reads, from the external storage medium installed in the multimedia player, a menu item image visually representing a summary of the content stored in the external storage medium, before a user provides an

instruction to playback the content, and

the menu controller places the multiple function icons in a first direction on a screen, places the medium icons in a second direction that crosses the first direction on the screen, visually highlights the medium icon located in the neighborhood of an intersection between an array in the first direction and an array in the second direction as a focus of attention, and displays the menu item image read from the external storage medium corresponding to the highlighted medium icon, in the neighborhood of the highlighted medium icon, before the user provides an instruction to playback the content.

2. The multimedia player according to claim 1, wherein the reader reads, from a predetermined area in the external storage medium installed in the multimedia player, the menu item image generated according to a predetermined rule related to image size, and

the menu controller generates the image data for the on-screen menu by visually blending the menu item image with an array of function icons and an array of medium icons.

3. The multimedia player according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the image generated according to the rule and read by the reader comprises a foreground image of a size that does not interfere with the array of function icons, and a background

image on which is superimposed the array of functional icons, and

the menu controller generates the image data for the on-screen menu by visually blending at least one of the foreground image and the background image with the array of function icons.

4. The multimedia player according to any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the reader reads, from the external storage medium installed in the multimedia player, a content icon representing a content stored in the external storage medium, and

the menu controller places the content icon thus read at a position of the medium icon or in the neighborhood thereof.

5. The multimedia player according to claim 4, wherein the content icon read by the reader from the external storage medium installed in the multimedia player comprises an icon in a moving image format and an icon in a still image format, and

the menu controller highlights the content icon in the moving image format as a focus of attention and does not highlight the content icon in the still image format.

6. The multimedia player according to any one of claims 1 to

5, wherein the reader reads, from the external storage medium installed in the multimedia player, control information indicating whether the content stored in the external storage medium is access-restricted,

the storage further stores user-configured restriction configuration data designating whether to activate access restriction, and

if the control information specifies that the content stored in the external storage medium corresponding to the medium icon in focus be access-restricted, and if the restriction configuration data specifies activation of access restriction, the menu controller displays an associated menu item image on the condition that information necessary to lift access restriction is entered by the user.

7. A method of displaying an on-screen menu by an apparatus capable of playing back digital contents, comprising:

reading a content from an external storage medium installed in the apparatus to serve as an area for storing data for the content played back in the apparatus;

reading, from a predetermined storage, data for a plurality of function icons representing respective types of playback functions for playing back respective types of contents, and data for a plurality of medium icons representing respective types of external storage mediums that can be installed in the apparatus; and

displaying an on-screen menu related to playback of the content and playing back the content read;

generating image data for the on-screen menu in which the plurality of function icons and at least one of the plurality of medium icons are arranged in a two-dimensional array, wherein

the reading reads, from the external storage medium installed in the apparatus, a menu item image visually representing a summary of the content stored in the external storage medium, before a user provides an instruction to playback the content, and

the generating places the multiple function icons in a first direction on a screen, places the medium icons in a second direction that crosses the first direction on the screen, visually highlights the medium icon located in the neighborhood of an intersection between an array in the first direction and an array in the second direction as a focus of attention, and displays the menu item image read from the external storage medium corresponding to the highlighted medium icon, in the neighborhood of the highlighted medium icon, before the user provides an instruction to playback the content.

8. The method of displaying an on-screen menu according to claim 7, wherein the reading reads, from a predetermined area in the external storage medium installed in the apparatus,

the menu item image generated according to a predetermined rule related to image size, and

the generating generates the image data for the on-screen menu by visually blending the menu item image with an array of function icons and an array of medium icons.

9. The method of displaying on-screen menu according to claim 7 or 8, wherein the image generated according to the rule and read in the reading comprises a foreground image of a size that does not interfere with the array of function icons, and a background image on which is superimposed the array of functional icons, and

the generating generates the image data for the on-screen menu by visually blending at least one of the foreground image and the background image with the array of function icons.

10. The method of displaying an on-screen menu according to any one of claims 7 to 9, wherein the reading reads, from the external storage medium installed in the apparatus, a content icon representing a content stored in the external storage medium, and

the generating places the content icon thus read at a position of the medium icon or in the neighborhood thereof.

11. The method of displaying an on-screen menu according to

claim 10, wherein the content icon read from the external storage medium installed in the apparatus comprises an icon in a moving image format and an icon in a still image format, and

the generating highlights the content icon in the moving image format as a focus of attention and does not highlight the content icon in the still image format.

12. The method of displaying an on-screen menu according to any one of claims 7 to 11, wherein the reading reads, from the external storage medium installed in the apparatus, control information indicating whether the content stored in the external storage medium is access-restricted,

the reading further reads user-configured restriction configuration data designating whether to activate access restriction, and

if the control information specifies that the content stored in the external storage medium corresponding to the medium icon in focus be access-restricted, and if the restriction configuration data specifies activation of access restriction, the generating displays an associated menu item image on the condition that information necessary to lift access restriction is entered by the user.

13. A computer program product for displaying an on-screen menu by an apparatus capable of playing back digital contents,

comprising:

an acquiring module which acquires an instruction related to playback of a content via a user's instruction;

a reading module which reads the content from an external storage medium installed in the apparatus to serve as an area for storing data for the content played back in the apparatus;

a storing module which stores data for a plurality of function icons representing respective types of playback functions for playing back respective types of contents, and data for a plurality of medium icons representing respective types of external storage mediums that can be installed in the apparatus; and

a processing module which displays an on-screen menu related to playback of the content and plays back the content read;

a generating module which generates image data for the on-screen menu in which the plurality of function icons and at least one of the plurality of medium icons are arranged in a two-dimensional array, wherein

the reading module reads, from the external storage medium installed in the apparatus, a menu item image visually representing a summary of the content stored in the external storage medium, before a user provides an instruction to playback the content, and

the generating module places the multiple function

icons in a first direction on a screen, places the medium
icons in a second direction that crosses the first direction
on the screen, visually highlights the medium icon located in
the neighborhood of an intersection between an array in the
first direction and an array in the second direction as a
focus of attention, and displays the menu item image read
from the external storage medium corresponding to the
highlighted medium icon, in the neighborhood of the
highlighted medium icon, before the user provides an
instruction to playback the content.

14. The computer program product according to claim 13,
wherein the reading module reads, from a predetermined area
in the external storage medium installed in the apparatus,
the menu item image generated according to a predetermined
rule related to image size, and

the generating module generates the image data for the
on-screen menu by visually blending the menu item image with
an array of function icons and an array of medium icons.

15. The computer program product according to claim 13 or 14,
wherein the image generated according to the rule read by the
reading module comprises a foreground image of a size that
does not interfere with the array of function icons, and a
background image on which is superimposed the array of
functional icons, and

the generating module generates the image data for the on-screen menu by visually blending at least one of the foreground image and the background image with the array of function icons.

16. The computer program product according to any one of claims 13 to 15, wherein the reading module reads, from the external storage medium installed in the apparatus, a content icon representing a content stored in the external storage medium, and

the generating module places the content icon thus read at a position of the medium icon or in the neighborhood thereof.

17. The computer program product according to claim 16, wherein the content icon read from the external storage medium installed in the apparatus comprises an icon in a moving image format and an icon in a still image format, and

the generating module highlights the content icon in the moving image format as a focus of attention and does not highlight the content icon in the still image format.

18. The computer program product according to any one of claims 13 to 17, wherein the reading module reads, from the external storage medium installed in the apparatus, control information indicating whether the content stored in the

external storage medium is access-restricted,

the storing module further stores user-configured restriction configuration data designating whether to activate access restriction, and

if the control information specifies that the content stored in the external storage medium corresponding to the medium icon in focus be access-restricted, and if the restriction configuration data specifies activation of access restriction, the generating module displays an associated menu item image on the condition that information necessary to lift access restriction is entered by the user.

19. A computer readable recording medium which stores a computer program product according to any one of claims 13 to 18.